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NSA Professor Rachel Sigman Honored With 2020 Hamming Teaching Award

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Rebecca Hoag | September 22, 2020



Department of National Security Affairs Asst. Professor Rachel Sigman's work ethic and commitment to student success led to her selection as the 2020 recipient of the university's Annual Richard W. Hamming Award for Teaching.

During her five years teaching at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Dr. Rachel Sigman has given her all to her work and her students as a National Security Affairs (NSA) assistant professor. Her dedication was formally recognized this year when she received the 2020 Richard W. Hamming Award for Teaching.

"First, I was very shocked to have won!" Sigman says. "But once I got over the shock, I thought to myself how much I have benefitted from the many dedicated and skilled educators at NPS and especially in the National Security Affairs department; and how grateful I am to work in such an environment."

According to the Hamming Award citation, Sigman works to meet students where they're at and helps them reach their goals in the NSA field. She does this through designing course content to fit her students' interests and needs, and providing extensive feedback on assignments.

Outside the classroom, Sigman tirelessly works as a thesis advisor to a large number of students. She is known for her diligent work ethic, and consistently encourages deserving students to publish their work. She continues to keep up with her graduated students too, having met with some on trips to Africa, Germany and Washington.

"I strongly believe that providing meaningful and fulfilling research experiences for students is the best way to inspire curiosity that will endure past their time at NPS," Sigman says. "I have therefore sought out avenues to enrich students' research experiences while they are at NPS, including getting them engaged in sponsored research, facilitating opportunities for students to conduct field research in Africa, and helping students get their work published."

In addition to being passionate about her students, Sigman is also passionate about teaching about Africa. She describes her job as helping students learn to cope with uncertainty and to be open to new experiences.

"There are a lot of misconceptions about [Africa] and all its diversity. It's extremely important to me to find effective ways to alter any misconceptions; and to be honest with students about the many uncertainties and complexities that we encounter when studying African countries," Sigman said.

Sigman has also worked to better the Navy and DOD educational programs by delivering lectures for the Navy's Foreign Area Officers (FAO) II AFRICOM course, designing and delivering modules on African politics and economics for the Defense Security Cooperation University's Regional Certification course, spoken to the Defense Language Institute (DLI)'s FAO seminar series and lecturing for the Defense Contract Audit Agency Leadership Course.